



# Just Another Day in Paradise

By Bill Schaller  
Illustration by Jason Lueder

It was the 15th of November. Deer season had been open since the 10th and this was my first day off since the opener. I slammed down a couple bowls of cereal, a banana, and grabbed the lunch I had prepared the night before. As I drove the 20 miles to my hunting area I noticed myself smiling. Relaxed and smiling, like a kid on his way to an amusement park.

The great archer and conservationist, Fred Bear, had said: "Go afield with a good attitude with respect for the wildlife you hunt and for the forests and fields in which you walk. Immerse yourself in the outdoor experience. It will cleanse your soul and make you a better person."

As I neared my hunting area, I noticed lights on in the cabin where some friends were staying. I pushed open the cabin door to see two guys up and two guys down. It seems Joe and Dan had harvested their deer the day before. Doug and John were still hunting, so we made plans. Doug would go to a tree stand not far from the cabin and John headed west where the other guys had earlier spotted some bucks. I set out for a deep draw I knew held many does. After all, the rut was on. And where there are does, there are bucks.

Winter arrived early for western North Dakota. A week earlier, 8-10 inches of snow blanketed the area, making driving and walking difficult. I parked my pickup, loaded the old .44, and headed west just as legal shooting time began. I carried a folding stool, a full fanny pack, some antlers for rattling, and enough enthusiasm to get me through two deer seasons. As I've aged, I've changed my hunting methods and now pursue deer only with bow, pistol or muzzle-loader. I need to get up close and personal with the critters, so still-hunting suits me. I'll find a desirable spot to sit for 20-30 minutes, then move anywhere from a few hundred yards to a half-mile, only to sit again, wait, rattle, grunt and watch the world go by. Whether this method proves successful doesn't matter. As the aging rock star and hunter Ted Nugent said: "Nature surely heals. A hunting license is a ticket to the ultimate health spa the world has to offer."

---

Every hunter measures  
the hunt differently.

Some need shooting.

Some need a trophy.

Some just enjoy the fresh air  
and open spaces.

Some want to fill the freezer.

---

Just a half-mile into my hike, I saw several does. I glassed the area, but couldn't find what my deer tag read: whitetail buck. Then I saw a nice little four-point buck with his nose to the ground about to disappear over a ridge. I sat and worked the grunt tube, letting it do its job. The buck turned and slowly came my way, maybe more out of curiosity than anything else. He came to within 75 yards, but kept enough brush between us to prevent a clean shot. I holstered the pistol and tried crawling about 10 yards to get the shot I needed, but the buck had other ideas and was gone in an instant.

I continued north along Deep Draw, observing several does, but no bucks. A quarter-mile north, I again peered into the draw and unfolded my stool. About one mile west I saw a muley buck with a doe. Below me were two forkhorn whitetails and many does. Suddenly a big muley buck broke from the timber and headed west over the ridge. He appeared to be running around searching for does.

I was just relaxing on my stool when more movement caught my eye from below. I threw the binoculars up to see a large bobcat hunting his way along. I watched in awe as the tom made his way, searching for rabbits in heavy brush. I have seen maybe 10 bobcats in my time and each encounter gets the old ticker going. Then I remembered that a few years ago I had stumbled onto a den near here. And Doug and his boys saw a female with kits only about a half-mile from this spot a couple of deer seasons ago.

As I watched the stealthy predator hunt, I heard some noise behind me, enough noise that even a half-deaf guy like me couldn't ignore. I turned to see a spike and a six-point bull elk trot out of the timber not 75 yards away. Wow. What a day so far. After seeing some more whitetail does and a small muley buck, I figured I had just about worn out that spot. I strapped the stool around my waist and continued north.

After a while, I sat and rattled the antlers I'd carried. Getting no response, I moved down to where Deep Draw intersects another draw. As I descended, I saw a doe walk up the hill. I quickly sat in the snow and braced the .44 on my knees. Sure enough, a nice

whitetail buck followed. When he was broadside at about 60 yards I made a grunt-like noise. The buck stopped long enough for me to put a round through both lungs.

As I approached the beautiful creature, I felt a small tinge of remorse. I hoped he had the opportunity to pass along his genes with not only this doe, but several others. I thanked God for wild animals and wild places and began dressing out the buck. Even before I was finished, chickadees came fluttering around to eat. If I sat still, they would approach to within two feet. What a day I was having. But I needed help getting my deer out.

To say I was excited would be an understatement. I walked the two miles back to the pickup without gloves, even though it was only about 25 degrees. I arrived back at the cabin about noon. Neither Doug nor John had seen a buck. I told them about my morning – many does, three mule deer bucks, four whitetail bucks, two elk and a bobcat. We reminisced about bobcat sightings as we ate lunch. Then all five of us headed back to retrieve my deer. We took two sleds along in case we needed to split the carcass for the trip out. But the others said they would pull him out in one piece. I was recovering from hernia surgery so I couldn't help. I don't suppose I can use that excuse again this year. After finally getting the buck back to the pickup, one of the guys did say that if I shot a deer in that spot again, I could just plan on eating it there.

Back at the cabin I sat and thought about my day. I was fortunate to have experienced such a wonderful mixture of wildlife, har-

vest one of God's creatures, fill the freezer with healthy venison, and have good friends drag out my deer. Suddenly, Dan pointed out the window and said, "Look. A duck."

Sure enough, a lone mallard was winging it above the frozen ground when, out of nowhere, a falcon smacked the duck from above, sending them both tumbling into the timber. From his tree stand, Doug heard the duck's last squeals before Mother Nature began to recycle the bird. The circle of life goes on, whether it's a falcon or a human predator.

Every hunter measures the hunt differently. Some need shooting. Some need a trophy. Some just enjoy the fresh air and open spaces. Some want to fill the freezer. We each have to decide what the hunt means and how to conduct ourselves while hunting. The father of conservation, Aldo Leopold, once wrote: "A peculiar virtue in wildlife ethics is that the hunter ordinarily has no gallery to applaud or disapprove of his conduct. Whatever his acts, they are dictated by his own conscience, rather than by a mob of onlookers. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this fact."

Leopold's observations are as true today as they were 65 years ago. With so few game wardens in North Dakota, today's hunter must decide how to act while outdoors, and what a successful hunt really means. Even without harvesting a deer, that fall day will never be forgotten. I know how fortunate I am to have witnessed in one day some things most people will never observe in a lifetime. Adding some venison to the mix was just frosting on the cake.

---

**BILL SCHALLER** is a Game and Fish district game warden in Killdeer. The deer hunt he writes about took place in 2000.